

The Relationship Between First and Second Languages and Culture: Finding a Cross-Cultural Identity

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This study attempted to identify exactly what it is that defines the social integration of Chinese immigrant ESL youngsters and under what circumstances either Chinese or English language is used. The influence of native and host cultures on the acculturation process of immigrant ESL students was accessed via a social adaptation questionnaire. The data revealed the existence of some cultural tensions Chinese bilingual and bicultural youngsters experience as they seek to understand the American culture and learn English as a second language. The Chinese language represented a way of maintaining their own identity while adapting socially to the majority culture. By developing a cross-cultural identity they are able to maintain their ethnic loyalties as they struggle to find a cultural voice in America.

"When I first came to New York , I wanted to turn around and go home. After two years in America, I'm beginning to see a new life. I wonder if I'll stay here after college or go back to Hong Kong."

Lily W.
a 17 year old Chinese student

Lily, like so many immigrant adolescents, is experiencing the struggle of trying to define a new personal identity in America. Her comments reveal an emotional dilemma wherein she feels torn between loyalties to two culturally and linguistically different worlds. The quote clearly describes a cultural tension (Tong, 1996) stemming from pride in and attachment to both the native and host cultures. How Lily balances her ethnic loyalties and what happens to her during the time she is working toward finding her cultural voice and identity in America, are factors that make the study of the acculturation process so fascinating. The social adaptation of new immigrants to America

is a complex phenomenon requiring attention not only to the social and psychological adjustments individuals experience, but also how they use the first and second languages to signal their degree of acculturation to the host culture. Williams and Snipper (1990) describe the adjustment process of immigrant youngsters as living between the values of the new and old cultures, a difficult position indeed.

Sociologists studying Asians have focused primarily on generalized group characteristics such as filial piety and obligation. Studies of such generalized characteristics have made important initial contributions to the understanding of this group. However, these studies do not provide a complete sense of the idiosyncratic acculturation process of this group. Investigators, among them Yao and Sung, have enriched and expanded the literature on the acculturation process of Chinese immigrants. Yao's (1978) research on attitude and adjustment, the bonding effect of home language and home culture (1983a), the ethnic awareness of Chinese teenagers (1983b), the changing extrinsic cultural traits of Chinese immigrants (1986), and the social and cultural problems that hamper learning (1987), has added to our understanding of this ethnic group. Sung's studies have also given us insight about the immigration of Chinese immigrants (1967), the social adjustment of Chinese immigrant children (1987), and the increasing number of interracial marriages among Chinese-Americans (1990). Both Yao's and Sung's research have set the stage for more comprehensive studies on the acculturation of this group.

Language and Identity

This article explores the factors that characterize the acculturation process of recent Chinese immigrant students. The goal is to identify some of the variables that define the group's social integration and under what circumstances either Chinese or English is used. For purposes of this discussion, the social integration strategy, identified as social adaptation by Schumann (1976, 1986), serves as a framework

within which the acculturation of Chinese immigrant students will be explored.

The importance of language in the process of acculturation has been explored by Schumann (1976, 1978, 1986, 1990) in his acculturation model. His research (1976, 1986) on acculturation examines the social and psychological integration of immigrant students as a predictor of the amount of English language they acquire and use. Schumann maintains that the acquisition and use of English is a measure of the degree to which students have become acculturated to the host culture. Acculturation, according to Schumann (1986), refers to the social and psychological contact between members of a particular group and members of the target culture. The more interaction (i.e., social/psychological closeness) a group has with the target group, the more opportunities will result for the group to acquire and use English. Conversely, less interaction (i.e., social/psychological distance) results in less acquisition and use of English. The group's amount of contact with the target culture has an effect on the amount of English acquired and used.

Early studies by Fishman (1972), Berry (1980), Olmedo (1980), and Padilla (1980), among others, contributed to our growing understanding of the relationship between language and acculturation. Fishman (1972) explained that a group's choice of language used for communication signals their code for group identity. Berry (1980) stressed the importance of analyzing the behavior of individuals for the psychological effects acculturation might produce. Olmedo's research (1980) on quantitative models of acculturation described statistical procedures for measuring and conceptualizing the process. Padilla (1980) explained that the connection between language and culture could be measured by the degree of familiarity with, and use of the target language by a group. These studies point to the interrelatedness of language and culture in the process of acculturation.

Balancing two cultures and two languages, Williams and Snipper (1990) claim, is a complex process involving different degrees of stress at different times during acculturation. Although seemingly at

a crossroads of creating her new identity, Lily (the student quoted above) maintains strong emotional ties to her first language and home culture. It may be that when Lily attempts to operate within both cultures she experiences some amount of anxiety. Her preferred language is Chinese although she is quite fluent in English. The choice of Chinese over English however, clearly signals her group identity (Brilliant, Lvovich & Markson, 1995; Fishman, 1972) and this choice also reflects the social structure in which Lily sees herself (Brilliant et al., 1995).

Social Networks and Acculturation

Interestingly, Lily's emotional ties to her first culture and language also make her part of a "social network" of individuals who share a common system of cultural values (Fasold, 1984) and use Chinese over English for communication. The strength of one's social network, Milroy (1987) explains, enables an individual to resist linguistic and social pressure to conform to the ways of the larger society. In essence, despite signals of an emergent social adaptation to the target culture, this student's ethnic loyalty (Padilla, 1980) remains with her native culture and language.

Understanding how social networks function to protect the cultural identity of groups may be a key to appreciating how the acculturation process operates. The increasing number of Chinese immigrants making their lives here and developing their social networks has drawn attention to a need to explore how this group becomes linguistically, socially, and psychologically adjusted to the American mainstream culture (Lue & Malony, 1983; Sung, 1987, 1990; Yao, 1986).

The Study

The intention of the present investigation was to extend both the sociological research of Yao and the anthropological perspectives of Sung. It was conducted from a sociolinguistic perspective (Fishman,

1972) that emphasizes the interaction between the use of language and social organization of behavior. Specifically, the study looked at the social context of language usage by immigrant Chinese who arrived recently in America. The bicultural aspect of the study incorporated ideas from research regarding cultural interdependence (Hamers & Blanc, 1989), cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty (Padilla, 1980).

The findings presented here are derived from a larger study (Tong, 1996) that analyzed the relationships between the levels of first and second language literacy, and the social adaptation of new Chinese immigrant students as they explore the first steps in becoming part of American society. It examined data collected on these students' use of Chinese and English and how social adaptation was defined by them. Examining the factors related to acculturation may provide insight about the way recent Chinese immigrants become socially adapted to the larger society.

Methodology

Subjects

The sample included 190 newly arrived adolescent Chinese immigrants. This group lived in a large metropolitan area and attended an alternative high school that addressed the special linguistic and affective concerns of older non-acculturated students. In this setting, the student-to-teacher ratio was smaller than average, allowing for more focused attention to the students' learning needs.

Selection of Participants. School records were checked in order to compile a sampling frame of students who had been in America from one to three years, spoke Chinese as their dominant language, and were connected to the Chinese community for essential activities (e.g., work, dining). A random digit table (Beyer, 1968) was applied to the sampling frame to identify a potential list of participants. Potential subjects were interviewed for possible selection as

participants for the study. A schedule was then arranged to administer a social adaptation research instrument to assess the quality and degree to which they were acculturating to the mainstream society. Sixty of the 250 potential participants were disqualified after a review of their instruments revealed incomplete data. This eliminating procedure resulted in the final sample of 190 individuals.

Student demographic sheets were administered and yielded information on nine variables: gender, age, grade level, native country, language spoken, length of residence in America, academic preparation, amount of English studied in native country, and place of work.

Within the sample, 52.6% were male ($n=100$) and 44.2% were female ($n=84$) and 3.2% ($n=6$) were unidentified. All subjects were between 16 and 23 years of age and were placed in grades 9-12. Eighty-four respondents (44.2%) reported that they worked in Chinatown and thirteen students (6.9%) worked outside of the Chinese community. Ninety-three respondents (48.9%) had missing data. The respondents' education level is reported in Table 1.

Instrumentation

Social Adaptation Measurement

The *Social Adaptation Questionnaire* gathered data on students' language use, social networks, and lifestyles. This questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first part contained 26 questions that assessed language choice and how first and second languages were used in everyday situations at home, school, and the workplace. The second part contained 55 questions on the social networks and lifestyle of the respondents. The 81 items were designed to tap various hypothesized dimensions of acculturation such as language use, social networks, and lifestyle as per Olmedo's (1980) model. A frequency distribution was tabulated to assess how often students spoke Chinese compared to English. An exploratory factor analysis was computed to identify factors that explained the correlations among the set of questions.

Table 1. Education of Respondent, and Amount of English Studied (N= 190)

Variable	n	%
Education		
1 - 6 grade	1	.5
7 - 9 grade	42	22.1
10 - 12 grade	143	75.5
Missing data	4	2.0
Amount of English Studied		
0 - 6 mos.	46	24.2
7 - 12 mos.	23	12.1
1 - 3 years	67	35.3
3 - 5 years	20	10.5
5 - 7 years	7	3.7
7 + years	16	8.4
Missing data	11	5.8

Results

Social Adaptation Questionnaire Data

In the first part of the instrument, information about the use of spoken Chinese was rated on a scale of 0 to the highest possible score of 26. Sample scores ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 26. Use of English language scores had a possible range from the lowest possible score of 0 to the highest possible score of 26. Students in the sample scored in a range from a minimum of 0 (no English) to a maximum of 20. Students' scores in general indicated more frequent use of Chinese than English. See Table 2 for statistical data on language use.

Table 2. Mean, Median, Standard Deviation for Frequency Use of Language: Chinese and English (N= 190)

Variable	Mean	Median	SD
Chinese	21.66 of 26	22.00	3.90
English	4.17 of 26	3.00	3.54

The second part of the questionnaire collected information regarding students’ lifestyle and social networks. An exploratory factor analysis was computed to identify factors that explained the correlations among the set of questions of this part of the survey. The factor analysis identified 18 factors with an eigenvalue of 1 or more that related to the social adaptation variables. To reduce the number of factors, a scree test was applied. A scree test is a criterion for determining the number of significant factors to be retained (Kim & Mueller, 1978). From the initial 18 factors, a three factor model most parsimoniously explained the data. Data analysis yielded results different from the originally hypothesized dimensions of social adaptation (i.e., language use, social networks, lifestyle) and suggested a new interpretation: language use, social commitment to the American culture (Factor 1), Chinese cultural preference (Factor 2), and social exploration of the American culture (Factor 3). See Table 3 for statistical data from this factor analysis.

Internal Consistency Reliability. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients were calculated to estimate internal consistency reliability among items on the *Social Adaptation Questionnaire* (Language Use and Factors 1, 2, 3). Results confirm the strength of the internal consistency for items of part 1 of language use, and also confirm the strength of the factor loadings on the factors found in part two of the questionnaire.

Table 3. Results of Varimax Rotation for the 3 Factor Model Social Commitment, Chinese Preference, Social Exploration (N = 190)

Variable	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Social Commitment to the American Culture	
1. Participate in Activities Outside of Chinatown	.64
2. Participate in American Activities	.58
3. Participate in Chinatown Activities	.54
4. Involved in Chinatown Activities	.53
5. Use Credit Cards	.51
6. Spend Leisure Time Outside Chinatown	.49
7. Americans Understand the Chinese Culture	.46
8. Friends Are Other Than Chinese or American	.46
9. Like American Food	.42
10. Willing Go to American Theater	.42
11. Have American Driver's License	.40
12. Understand American Ways	.39
13. Feel Safe Outside Chinatown	.35
14. Willing to Work Outside the Chinese Community	.34
15. Willing to Take a Taxi	.32
16. Plan to Buy a Car	.30
17. Enjoy American Television	.30
Factor 2: Chinese Preference	
1. Like Chinese Friends	.60
2. Friends Now Are Chinese	.53
3. Enjoy Chinese Movies	.52
4. Willing to Date Chinese	.49
5. Willing to Meet Chinese Friends	.48
6. Prefer Shop Chinatown	.47
7. Can Find Happiness in Native Country	.47
8. Prefer Watching Chinese Television Programs	.45
9. Feel Part of My Native Country	.44
10. Like Chinese Friends	.43
11. Willing to Go to Chinese Theater	.43
12. Listen to Chinese Music	.39
13. Succeed in Native Country	.30
Factor 3: Social Exploration	
1. Willing to Make New American Friends	.63
2. Go to New Communities Other Than Chinatown	.54
3. Willing to Travel Outside of Chinatown	.51
4. Like Chinese and American Friends	.50
5. Friends are Chinese and American	.47
6. Take a Taxi or Bus Outside My Neighborhood	.43
7. Willing to Date Chinese and Americans	.42
8. Listen to American Music	.37
9. Like Having American Friends	.33
10. Feelings of Success in America	.32
11. Willing to Date Americans	.30

Interpreting Reliability Among Variables. The strength of the relationships among the major variables (i.e., Chinese literacy, Language Use, and Factors 1, 2, 3) was explored using a Pearson product moment correlation. There were statistically significant correlations among all three factors. Correlations occurred between social commitment (Factor 1) and Chinese cultural preference (Factor 2), social commitment (Factor 1) and social exploration (Factor 3), and between Chinese cultural preference (Factor 2) and social exploration (Factor 3). Language use, specifically English, had a statistically significant correlation ($p < .01$) with social exploration (Factor 3). It also had a significant correlation ($p < .05$) with social commitment to the American culture. These findings might have predictive value concerning students' attitudes toward America. See Table 4 for statistical data regarding these findings.

Table 4. Correlational Coefficients for Social Adaptation Language Use, Factor 1, Factor 2 and Factor 3 (N = 190)

Variable	Name	Factor 2	Factor 3	Language Use/Chinese	Language Use/English
Factor 1	Social Commitment	.46***	.49***	-.05	.18*
Factor 2	Chinese Preference		.52***	.10	-.02
Factor 3	Social Exploration			.03	.21**
Language Use/Chinese					-.74***

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Discussion

Social Adaptation Instrument

Part 1: First and Second Language Use. Several trends were noted in the analysis of this study's data concerning the use of Chinese and English languages. First, respondents clearly indicated a preference for using Chinese most of the time in everyday social situations. Interestingly, this preferred use of Chinese, McKay and Wong (1988) observe, is a result of on-going immigration by other speakers of Chinese who provide a continuing community of Chinese speakers. As with all language groups (Fasold, 1984), the language choice made by this group reflects how and with whom they want to be identified. This declaration in turn, creates the basis for the group's social networks. Additionally, of interest to the present study is how the strength of the social networks resulted in a resistance to linguistic and social pressure to acculturate to the larger society. Respondents were able to maintain their native culture and language while becoming progressively more acquainted with a new second culture and language. In effect, the group's social adaptation is characterized as becoming more bicultural and bilingual in nature while remaining loyal to the Chinese language and their heritage.

Second, the results regarding language use showed attempts by the respondents to use some English during their adjustment to being in America. In this study, the initial attempt of respondents' English use was, however, unanticipated. Respondents' use of language may signal the beginning stages of the group's emerging identity (Fasold, 1984) within the American culture, wherein respondents maintained their use of Chinese while beginning to use English as well. This finding suggests an added dimension to their social adaptation, an emergence of a new "cross-group identity" (Tong, 1996).

Cross-group identity refers to respondents' willingness to use different languages for different functions and participate in both cultures. The use of English for school, work, or everyday encounters with members of the larger society reveals a motivation on the part

of students to integrate somewhat into the mainstream culture. However, they remained closely connected to their native language. Students used their preferred native language with family members and friends, and during native-culture activities.

This observed phenomenon supports Schumann's (1986) notion of social adaptation, wherein a group uses an integrative strategy to negotiate between two cultures. The group accepts, to varying degrees, the lifestyle and values of the larger society, but maintains its own lifestyle and values for intragroup use. While social and psychological contact with the target language group is an essential component of acculturation, Schumann maintains, adoption of the lifestyle and values of the target language group (characteristics traditionally associated with the notion of acculturation) is not necessary for successful acquisition and use of the target language. The conscious attempt by non-native English speakers to assign functions for the use of each language could be interpreted as the willingness of the group to take preliminary steps to become acculturated to the larger society.

Part 2: Social Adaptation. In addition to the data on language use, the questionnaire collected data on social adaptation. A three factor model emerged from its analysis. The data described a group that is willing to integrate to the larger society, but retains its original identity, including language. The three factors help to construct a definition of social adaptation for the respondents. The first factor, social commitment to the American culture, describes how respondents see themselves getting involved with the main culture. Their responses reveal ways in which they see themselves becoming a part of the main culture. These include getting a driver's license, buying a car, and obtaining credit cards.

The second factor, Chinese cultural and language preference, describes strong feelings of ethnic loyalty. Respondents' answers clearly revealed their emotional attachment to their native culture. Their responses expressed a desire to interact with Chinese friends, and thoughts of being successful and finding happiness in their native country.

The third factor, social exploration, describes a willingness by students to reach out and explore the host society. These responses reveal a desire to establish friendships with individuals who are not Chinese, and visit communities outside their own cultural enclaves.

The results of the survey provide a snapshot of the group's social adaptation process. Findings clearly describe the early stages of social adaptation of the respondents as evidenced by their economic, social, psychological, and linguistic connection to the Chinatown area of the urban center where they work, socialize, shop, dine, and conduct other essential life activities. Perhaps, in some ways, the close bond with Chinatown slowed down or prevented the group's full integration into the lifestyle of the larger society. Interestingly, this close bond with Chinatown also gives individuals a sense of security from which they develop confidence to strike out and explore an unfamiliar world. This "Chinatown factor" could be a temporary mediating factor in their acquisition of English and acculturation to mainstream America. While respondents are becoming socially adapted to the main culture, they remain loyal to the Chinese language and culture during the process.

These findings explain that the various avenues to social adaptation can be both helpful and hindering. Specifically, close association with their native culture and language was helpful because it provided a sense of security which infused some respondents with the confidence necessary to explore the mainstream culture. According to Lanca, Alksnis, Roese, and Gardner (1994) and Padilla, Lindholm, Chen, Hakuta, Lambert, and Tucker (1991), the increased self-esteem derived from maintaining use of their native language facilitates second language acquisition.

For others, close association with their home culture and language was a hindrance because its comfortable domain reduced the need to acculturate to the host society. Analysis of the data revealed a cultural tension that was present in the way the group behaved as members of both their native culture and the host culture. Respondents wanted to be identified with their native language and culture, yet were seeking ways to connect with the larger society.

For the respondents, the Chinese language represented a way of affirming their own identity while socially adapting to the majority culture. For this sample, the traditional conceptualization of social adaptation takes on a new dimension of "cross-cultural identity" characterized by a "Chinatown factor" variable and continued use of Chinese. These influences may have implications for the group's eventual success regarding their social adaptation and second language use and acquisition.

Conclusions and Implications

Ethnic identity, Ellis (1994) explains, can have a strong influence on attitudes toward the second culture and language. There is a need to understand the role students' first language and culture play in their successful acculturation (Hamers & Blanc, 1989). According to Brilliant et al. (1995), learning a second language may come at the expense of losing one's identity and culture, an unfortunate outcome of acculturation.

This study revealed the importance of a strong home culture identification in students' successful adaptation to a second language and culture. Results pertaining to students' preferred use of Chinese reflect a greater sense of comfort with the Chinese language compared to using English. This finding coupled with the group's desire to explore and participate in the American mainstream suggests the bicultural and bilingual nature of their social adaptation. Student decision to maintain his or her first culture and language is a key to understanding how we as educators can support them as they adapt to the mainstream American culture and learn English.

Lily's comment at the beginning of this article illustrates the complex phenomenon of social adaptation. She has accepted the lifestyle and values of the larger society to some degree, but has also maintained her own cultural lifestyle and value system for intragroup use. Lily's social network exists primarily within the Chinese community including the high school she attends in the lower east side of New York City located only a few blocks away from

Chinatown. She speaks mostly Chinese outside of class. Interestingly, she has chosen an American name for mainstream, but not home use. Adding to, but not replacing her identity, reflects the additive process of forming a cross-cultural identity. The selective use of her new name illustrates the complex process of acculturation, one of restructuring cultural values and norms (Garcia, 1994).

Typically our research attention has focused on the process of second language acquisition, sometimes to the exclusion of how students' first language and culture may influence the way they understand, acquire, and produce English. For meaningful and successful communication, our students need to be aware of both the subtle and obvious differences that exist between their first and second cultures. The importance of interpreting speech styles and speech acts appropriately to communicate effectively is a critical component in second language teaching and learning. Confusion related to the appropriate and correct interpretation of speech styles and speech acts in English can stem from differences between their native language and English.

Our understanding of sociolinguistics has influenced our thinking about the way we teach a second language by emphasizing the importance of knowing the relationship and the purpose of the exchange between speakers (Bachman, 1989; Canale, 1983). As educators, we need to appreciate not only our students' native culture and language, but also how and why their educational background might influence their second language interpretation, acquisition, and production. Educators need to consider the social and affective aspects of learning and using a second language. When this occurs, new and better ways for students to relate to second language learning may be provided.

For bilingual students, two languages and backgrounds can create what Simoes (1991) describes as cultural tension and conflict stemming from new experiences in an unfamiliar environment. A central point in the discussion on biculturalism is the way first and second languages are used, and especially how, Mayher (1990) claims, their usage reveals the thinking of individuals regarding their ethnic

preferences and values. Further study concerning how students cope with the embedded nature of ethnic loyalty within biculturalism might also yield interesting and useful findings.

Our students' bicultural and bilingual experience is worthy of closer examination. We will need to engage in research regarding the way they perceive how others view their experience; what this experience means to them; how they balance two cultures and two languages in response to the challenges of society; and what excites them about learning and using a second language and adapting to a host culture.

From a broader perspective, different ways of thinking by students of diverse cultures may influence their approach to learning (Reid, 1987). Limited English proficient students' unique learning styles, Reid notes, may cause them to spend most of their time making adjustments to their new learning situations.

One implication of the findings of this study is that the cultural identity of the respondents is indeed complex and may affect their perception of learning. For students to achieve communicative competence, they need to be able to recognize linguistic cues so they can respond meaningfully and appropriately within different social settings. Creative ideas stemming from our pedagogical reevaluation about the learning styles and acquisition of a second culture and language may change how and what we teach our students.

Lily's story illustrates how language and culture are inextricably related. Her opening quote describes a young person who is passing through a stage of acculturation. Related to her acculturation is the acquisition of English. Symbiotically, the successful acquisition of English depends on the synchronization of the linguistic and cultural aspects of acculturation (Hernandez, 1997).

Future research may provide a better understanding of the bicultural and bilingual experience of individuals across cultures. Using a broad societal context for directing further research, the following questions have been raised (Tong, 1996): How do individuals from different ethnolinguistic groups resolve their bilingualism? How does the role of first language and culture in

different ethnic/cultural groups affect their social adaptation? In what ways are the motivating reasons for first language related to language loyalty and language maintenance?

The questions raised have not been fully answered. However, this study has highlighted issues related to the bicultural and bilingual nature of social adaptation of Chinese immigrant adolescents. These issues may or may not apply to individuals from different ethnic groups and cultures. Findings from future investigations may reveal whether sociolinguistic phenomena differ across cultures, thus contributing to new cross-cultural knowledge paradigms.

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